Meeting the Challenges of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria: Problems, Possibilities, and Prospects

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Introduction

Africa is a continent in despair. Despite its enormous natural and human resource endowments, the continent has been trailing in all socio-economic indices of development when compare with other Third World regions. Despite considerable progress made by some countries in Asia and Latin America between 1990 and 2002, Africa as a whole suffered immensely, recorded the slowest progress overall and in some vital areas, it suffered reverses. Africa is synonymous with poverty, ignorance, and diseases; a sorry state that impoverish its people. In sub Saharan Africa (SSA), the number of people living in absolute poverty, i.e. US $1 or less per day, soared from 217 million in 1990 to 290 million in 2000 (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005: 1). It is disheartening that women form the bulk of this number. Also, adult life expectancy also declined from 50 years to 46 years during this period. It is on this basis that the Addis Ababa-based Economic Commission for Africa (2005: 1) argues that, "based on the trends of the past 15 years, SSA will not achieve the MDGs on time."

The situation in Nigeria does not fare better as the continent's most populous country has been confronting with development challenges and crisis of governance especially with the foray of military on its political scene. Nigeria, Africa's crippled giant, was among the world's 50 richest countries in the early 1970s but slumped to find itself among the 25 poorest countries in the world at the dawn of the 21st century. Despite its natural resource endowments and being the 6th largest oil exporter and 8th largest deposit of natural gas in the world (Soludo, 2006), it has the majority of poor population after China and India. Africa's crisis of development became compounded with the adoption of the Bretton Wood's institutions-inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), which enabled African governments' development plans and planning to give way to the rule of the market. This situation, contends Oladele (2009), "had devastating consequences for social sectors such as education and health which served the public goods. Unfortunately, SAP failed to deliver on all it promised, this left both the state and the people worse off…The lesson learnt from SAP is that African states are unable to meet the basic needs of their people when they externalize their economies and/or embrace the market."

Thus, the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[1] by the United Nations (UN) Millennium Summit in September 2000 was hailed as it provides the Third World countries, especially Africa, the new opportunity and drive to alleviate poverty and reverse the deterioration in human developments. The MDGs also represents the international community's commitment to provide an accountability framework and global partnership for progressively eradicating poverty in all its dimensions. With this declaration, developing countries are requested to prepare bold

[1] It should be noted that all the 18 targets and 48 indications contained in the MDGs are combination of previous declarations such as the 1995 Copenhagen UN World Summit on for Social Development, the 1995 Beijing Fourth UN Conference on Women, the 1994 Cairo UN Conference on Population and Development, the 1979 Convention on All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the 1992 Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) among other as well as regional, national, and international initiative.

national strategies to achieve the MDGs for making measurable improvements in the lives of the world's poorest citizens. Developed countries for their own part would increase their assistance to developing countries, particularly through high-level Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). Despite Nigeria's huge resource potentials and claim of its commitment to the realisation of the MDGs by 2015, meeting these fundamental eight goals is a daunting task. This challenge is not unconnected with the uncoordinated policy actions in those vital areas that MDGs aim to achieve as well as the problems of heavy external debt burden, poverty, corruption, etc.

Following from the foregoing analysis, this paper uses descriptive approach to probe the problems that are militating against the implementation and realization of the MDGs to improve the quality of life of average Nigerians through bridging the gap between social classes and gender. The paper puts emphasis on the roles of the multilateral agencies in assisting Nigeria to meet the MDGs. In the final analysis, the paper argues that for Nigeria to meet these goals, the panaceas lie in the effective policy coordination and the political will to match rhetoric with actions; implying that there is the need to formulate and implement policies that will promote transparency/accountability; overcome institutional constraints; promote pro-poor growth; bring about structural change; enhance distributive equity; promote human development, etc

Nigeria: The Political and Socio-Economic Contexts

As already adumbrated in the preceding section, Nigeria is challenged by economic crisis. Its total economic performance since the time of its political independence in October 1960 has not been impressive. During the first four decades of independence, i.e. between 1960 and 2000, the average annual growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was less than 4%. Although, Nigeria's rely on revenues from the sales of its oil and gas resources, unfortunately, this has not been translated into positive results as the country's economic performance has continuing to be weak while the incidences of poverty are on the increase.

Despite the fact that Nigeria has produced several billion dollars worth of oil since 1960, this has not been translated into socio-economic developments and improvements in the quality of life of average Nigerians. Udeh (2000) argues that between 1981 and 1999, Nigeria received over $228 billion from oil export receipt and sadly, the number of people living on a less than $1 per day more than doubled in three decades, i.e. between 1970 and 2000. Udeh contends further that "the proportion of the population living in poverty increased from 36% in 1970 to 70% in 2000. Furthermore, Nigeria's per capita income of US$260 in 2000 is much less than, indeed it is only one-third of its level, US$780, in 1980." (AFRODAD, 2005: 3; see also World Bank, 2003). Another factor plaguing the development of the economy is the country's huge external debts and debts service burden that have become highly unbearable. It is argued that Nigeria had little or no external debt before the mid-1980s as it undertook limited external borrowing.

Even after its 30-month civil war (1967-1970), Nigeria external debts were less than a billion dollar. Unfortunately, the situation took a dramatic turn in the late 1980s as external debts figures soared to almost $9 billion as loans were contracted from both official and private sources. Apparently, the reasons for the appalling turn of situation can be located within the context of military intervention in politics.

The country endured almost 30 years of military rule in the first four decades of its independence with negative consequences on its socio-economic situation. Under military rule, loans were irresponsibly contracted by military leaderships who plundered the nation's wealth including external loans for personal enrichment. From General Muhammadu Buhari to General Abdul Salami Abubakar through General Ibrahim Babangida, military rule and leaderships were marked by wholesale looting of national treasury and corruption with serious human rights violations. The real motives for external borrowing that the public sector needed to provide infrastructure, create jobs, etc with the overall objective of alleviating poverty became varnished as military dictators and cronies, as well as unscrupulous compradors embarked on looting spree (Ugolor and Atakpu, 2002). Under Babangida (1985-1993) more than $12.2 billion in oil revenues disappeared while under its successor, General Abacha (1993-1998) between $1 and $3 was personally stolen (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 16-17).

Apart from the fact that military rule is characterised by lack of transparency, accountability, and good governance "much of the failure of policy and the lack of development have been attributed to the abnormal situation where a country was denied democracy and the rule of law, but rather was forcibly subjected to military misrule." (AFRODAD, 2005: 3). The hopes that the advent of democratic rule in May 1999 will bring back the country's lost glory, relief, development and rapid socio-economic growth became dashed as "misguided macroeconomic and debts management policies under civilian rule have meant continued sluggish growth of real GDP, high inflation, and deepening poverty." (AFRODAD, 2005: 3).

Thus, Nigeria, despite the advent of democracy, entered the Third Millennium with poor economic records. Between 1999 and 2003, growth in real output averaging 3.5% per annum and with a population of growth rate of between 2.8% and 3% per annum, this portends little or no step forward in alleviating poverty and improves the socio-economic lots of average Nigerians. This economic picture looks bleak and far behind the required minimum growth rate of real GDP of 7% per annum to significantly reduce the number of people living in absolute poverty by half in 2015 and lead to the realisation of the MDGs (UNDP, 2003; Lal, 1999). This implies that much has to be done by the Nigerian government for the MDGs to be achieved.

The performance of the Nigerian economy during the first five years of its Fourth Republic (May 1999--) is dissatisfying. The annual average growth of real GDP was estimated at approximately 3.5% while the importance of other sectors is quickly declining (Lewis, 2004). In specific term, the performance of the manufacturing sector is weak

and fast declining while the rate of inflation increased from 6.6% in 1999 to 6.9% in 2000. It increased to 18.9% in 2001 but later stood at 14% in 2003 (see World Bank, 2005; UNDP 2004). Consequently, the level of gross external reserves remained relatively buoyant, growing from as low as $5.4 billion in 1999 to $9.4 in 2000, and later increased to $10.4 billion in 2001. It fell to a level of $7.3 billion in 2002. Conversely, It is massive external debt-service payments that have continued to drain the Nigerian economy (see Tables 1 and 2 for summaries of some selected macroeconomic indicators and economic trends).

Table 1: Nigeria: Selected Macroeconomic Indicators, 1999-2003

Year	Real GDP growth rate (%)	Fiscal deficit-GDP ratio (%)	Inflation rate (%)	External debt (US$ billions)
1999	2.8	-8.4	6.6	28.0
2000	3.9	-2.9	6.9	28.2
2001	4.2	-4.0	18.9	28.3
2002	4.0	-5.1	12.9	30.9
2003	3.7	-1.4	14.0	32.9

Source: (1) Central Bank of Nigeria; and (2) World Bank Africa Database, 2005.

Table 2: Economic Trends, 1998-2002

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Growth in Real GDP (%)	2.3	2.8	3.9	4.2	3.3
Overall Fiscal Balance % (GDP)	-4.8	-8.9	-2.1	-4	-5.1
Domestic Debt Stock % (GDP)	18.9	24.9	18.6	18.5	19.7
External Debt Stock % (GDP)	87.2	80.7	64	57.9	64.1
Overall External	-8.4	-9.8	6.3	0.4	-8.9

Balance % (GDP)					
Inflation Rate	10.3	6.6	6.9	18.9	12.9
Exchange Rate	85.6	96.1	101.7	111.9	120.5
GDP per Capita ₦	1041	1038.8	1046.8	1062.5	1065.4

Source: UNDP (2004) Nigeria Development Profile, UNDP, Nigeria.

The Millennium Development Goals: A Brief Overview

> Wherever we lift one soul from a life of poverty, we are defending human rights. And wherever we fail in this mission, we are failing human rights—Kofi Annan addressing the United Nations General Assembly on the MDGs, the United Nations, New York, 2000.

The epigraph above by the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, aptly captures the essence of the MDGs, which is to give meanings to human life. The MDGs has its origin in the September 2000 gathering of 189 Heads of State and Government for the United Nations Millennium Summit where the Millennium Declaration was ratified. Regarded by the Socialist International (2005) as part of the social democratic approach to governance in a global society, MDGs represents an unparalleled global commitment to free human beings especially those in the Third World regions from the bondage of absolute poverty and wretchedness. The Millennium Declaration, see by many as one of the most vital UN documents in recent time, offers the international society, both rich and poor the golden opportunity to have a common position and integrated vision on the best ways to address and solve the multidimensional problems facing humanity and to promote sustainable development. The Declaration's eight MDGs cover with the following issues, viz;

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. The target is to halve the proportion of people living on less than $1 daily and those suffering from hunger by 2015,
2. To achieve Universal Primary (Basic) Education. The target is to achieve universal basic completion by 2015,
3. To promote gender equality and women empowerment. The target is to totally overcome gender disparities in both primary and secondary education enrolment by 2005 and achieve equity at all levels by 2015,
4. To reduce child mortality. The target is to reduce child mortality rate by 2/3 by 2015,
5. To improve maternal health. The basic target is to reduce by ¾ the proportion of women dying in childbirth by 2015,
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The grand target is to stop and commence to reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases by 2015,

7. To ensure environmental sustainability. The target is to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation, and lastly,
8. To develop a global partnership for development. This goal recognises the importance of the collaboration between the have and have-nots to eradicate poverty and extreme hunger. To achieve this goal, world leaders recognised and emphasized their shared responsibilities to eradicate poverty globally. In this regards, Third World countries, reaffirmed their commitments to strengthen governance, institutions and policies, while developed countries for their own part, pledged an additional and more sustainable debt relief and increased trade and technology opportunities for the countries of Global South.

Nigeria: The Politics of Poverty Alleviation Programmes

The problems associated with poverty in Nigeria are multifaceted. Nigeria has no reason to be a poor country because of the vast economic potentials and human resources that it is endowed with. But why is Nigeria then lagging behind a country like Libya that relies only on oil for survival? Put differently, why can't Nigeria's agricultural base serves as an engine of growth and development as is the case of Côte d'Ivoire? Even the agriculture sector that was promising exports earnings for the country in the early years of its independence nose-dived with the commercial production and exportation of oil. Between 1974 and 1975, there were ambitious and aggressive drives by the Nigerian leadership to use the revenues accruing from oil to tackle the problems of underdevelopment in the country. Sadly, policy makers failed in the process of implementation, which ultimately debarred the country to achieve the stated goals (Richard, 1978: 222).

Self-sufficiency and self- reliance in food production has always been a daunting task for the policy makers in Nigeria, especially, after the ephemeral oil boom of the mid-1970s. In fact, this challenging situation is not confined to Nigeria. Akindele and Adebo (2004: 55) note that food production is a major challenge that the New States have to contend with. A retrospective look at the Nigeria's economic pattern shows that before the civil war the country relied on its agricultural base for its export earnings that represented "66 per cent of the country's foreign exchange, while it rose to 73.4 per cent in 1968" when activities in the oil sector were paralyzed due to the country's civil war (1967-1970) (Richard, 1978). The importation of food further wreaked serious havocs on agriculture when full exploitation of oil resumed in earnest and consequently, "the [g]overnment could think of no other alternative than to mortgage the country's economic future to the good behaviour and concordance of the multinationals and the local capitalists" (Richard, 1978: 224). Arguing along the same line, it is acknowledged that:

> During the 1970s, Nigeria evolved from a poor agricultural economy into a relatively rich, oil-dominated one. In 1969 the oil sector accounted for less than 3 per cent of GDP and a modest US$370 million in exports (42 per cent of total export); per capita income was only US$130; and more than half of GDP was generated in the agricultural sector. By 1980, the oil sector had come to account for nearly 30 per cent of GDP, oil exports totaled US$25 billion (96 per cent of total exports), and per capita income exceed US$1,100. Following the discovery and exploration of oil, the economy experienced many symptoms of the "Dutch disease" (NCEMA cited in www.gdnet.org).

Successive governments have been battling to stem the incidence of poverty and hunger, and their associated problems. The Military regime of General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975) launched the *National Accelerated Food Production Programme* (NAFPP) in 1972 but with no tangible result. It was with the intention to stem the deterioration in the agricultural sector that the government initiated policies that would encourage productivity because agriculture is still an important sector of the Nigerian economy. It was to tame the steady decline in agricultural productivity that in 1976 the Military government of General Obasanjo initiated the *Operation Feed the Nation* (OFN) programme and the development of the rural areas. However, OFN was also a colossal failure and waste of money as its predecessor, i.e. NAFPP. It is in this connection that it is important to highlight that these unsatisfactory results are related to the mentality associated with what is known, in the Nigerian parlance, as 'quick returns'. Richard (1978: 232) argues that "the drive for easy and rapid wealth greatly contrasts with the rigour of farm work and the corresponding lack of interest in long-term productive investments by Nigerian private entrepreneurs." Copying the military, the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) initiated the *Green Revolution Programme* with the objective of stemming the rising cost of food importation and increase productivity in agricultural sector. To all intents and purposes, the *Green Revolution* benefited only corrupt politicians and armchair bureaucrats/farmers and urban dwellers to the disadvantage of the teeming population of genuine farmers who could have made the necessary turn around in the poverty reduction drive. The General Muhammadu Buhari's regime (1983-1985) introduced the *Go Back to Land Programme* that showed signs of improvement in food production before a palace coup swept the Buhari's military government away. When General Babangida seized power in 1985, he introduced a new dimension to the politics of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria by giving high priority to the pet project of his spouse, *the Better Life Programme* for the poor that targeted especially woman in rural areas of the country. Furthermore, the Babangida regime initiated some poverty-controlled measures in the wake of the implementation of SAP that adversely affected the Nigerian poor. Such programmes included the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), a pro-Poor Bank that was inspired by the Bangladesh experience of the Grameen Bank, and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). All these became failed projects because of the grand corruption that characterized the Babangida's military government and official ineptitude to the execution of projects and cost the tax payers as over "100 billion Naira in phantom projects" (Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti, 2006: 67). Moreover, the outcome of the Babangida's poverty alleviation

programmes "could not trickle down to the poor. Rather, the incidence of poverty keeps on increasing" (NCEMA cited in www.gdnet.org). Although the fortune of agriculture has dwindled in this period of inclement economy, agriculture still provides employment for between "60-70% of the population...and gainfully engages about 90% of the rural dwellers, of which women constitute the majority." (The UN, 2002).

Definitely, the proverbial 'resource curse' is insufficient to explain the Nigerian contradiction. The answer can be found in the leadership style. The failure of the ruling elite to serve as a catalyst of development by implementing appropriate policies that will emancipate the generality of the population, as is the case of the Asian Tigers. Instead, the majority of Nigerians live in poverty that is most excruciating in the rural areas where "over 70% of the nation's population resides" (The UN, 2002). In fact, it is argued that there is deterioration in the quality of life of Nigerians and it has been worsening, especially, in the 1990s and as a result many Nigerians live below poverty line (NPC, 2007). The implementation of SAP led the Babangida's government to remove the socio-economic shock-absorbers and inflation in the prices of basic commodities soared (Odulana and Olomajeye, 1999). It is noted that lack of planning to sustain long-term development stifled growth, especially after the oil boom. SAP really impoverished many Nigerians, particularly the working class, the vulnerable section in the society at large, and even threatened the economic survival of the middle class. In fact, it is observed that:

> (…) [t]he Nigerian economy has suffered considerable decline, especially since the mid-1980s. This is perceived to be due to negative shocks in the international crude oil market and the adoption of the orthodox type structural adjustment programme in September 1986. The annual GDP growth rate in Nigeria during the last decade has been relatively low, averaging about 3 per cent, which is also the population growth, implying that welfare of the average Nigerian has not improved significantly (UNDP, 2004).

At last, Babangida stepped aside after his failed programme of transition to civilian government that cost Nigerians time and money. The Interim National Government (ING) of Chief Ernest Shonekan did not last long to initiate any poverty alleviation programme. Instead, the ING compounded the predicament of Nigerians by increasing the price of fuel that increased the rate of inflation. This worsened the unpopularity of the ING that was later overthrown by General Sani Abacha. Like his predecessor, Abacha did not miss the opportunity to initiate his own pro-poor programme in conjunction with his wife. The Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) was an ambitious and all-encompassing project designed to make life easy for Nigerians. The activities of the PTF, under the chairmanship of former military ruler, General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) ranged from supplying medications to public hospitals, to building or repairing roads, building schools, renovation of some university halls across the country, to providing bore holes to communities. Although, the PTF executed its projects, some suppliers did not live up to expectations as they supplied sub-standard equipments while physical infrastructures were poorly executed by some contractors. General Abacha's wife, Maryam, chaired her twin pet projects, the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement

Programme (FEAP) to better the lots of Nigerians. In the end when Abacha passed away in 1998, no economic advancement has been attained. The Nigerian poor were still struggling to survive while inflation was excruciatingly biting hard. It was discovered that FSP was also a monumental squander and financial drain pipe for corrupt official. Indeed, it was revealed that the "FSP gulped over N10 billion of tax payers money at a time her husband, Abacha, was retrenching hapless civil servants" (Maduagwu,Tell Magazine, 1998 as cited in www.analysis/alleviating_poverty).

The New Democratic Dispensation and Poverty Alleviation (1999-to date)

It was widely believed that when General Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd) emerged as the civilian president of Nigeria in May 1999, his sojourn and torment in Abacha's gulag would endear him with the plight of the poor. And it was also believed that his experience of the unsuccessful OFN was an asset in the socio-economic policy making. The introduction of a set of comprehensive policies at the three level of government that targets poverty reduction and the improvement of other important areas was in consonance with the UN's MDGs. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) which focuses the national level was an improvement on the previous poverty alleviation programmes: the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and the Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP) that aimed at reducing poverty among the youth by creating gainful employment for the youth through the Youth Employment Scheme (YES), and the development of rural infrastructure and natural resources. The same objectives are pursued at the state level with the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) while the same goals are implemented at the third level of government through the Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The government aimed at reducing poverty and creating jobs for the teeming population of unemployed youth through a "bottom-up approach that it is participatory" (UNDP, 2004) with these social policy frameworks.

Although, there has been progress in "the rate of growth that has risen from 2.5% in the 1990s to 6% during 2004-2007, including rapid increases in non-oil growth" (CBN, cited in UN: 2009). However, this development did not have any positive impact on Nigerians because "more than half of Nigerians (54.4% or 76 million people) live in poverty, twice the rate in 1980" (UN News, 2009). Poverty is a major indicator and determinant that has a lot of incidence on other factors. It is in this connection that we discuss the MDGs and how Nigeria is faring with the eradication of extreme poverty.

The MDGs and the Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger in Nigeria

Poverty pervades the Nigerian population. Poverty is still noticeable and its eradication is a daunting task for the government. The eradication of poverty is a significant objective in policy formulation and implementation in the emancipation of human being (UNDP, 2004). And as such, it should be a priority in decision-making for the Nigerian government. The 2006 MDGs Report statistics shows that "35% of the population lives in extreme poverty while much as 54% are poor in relative terms. Almost 52% on less than a dollar a day" (NPC, 2007). In general, poverty is more pervasive in the North than in the South of Nigeria. For example, the poverty rate is 67.3% in the North East zone, 62.9% in North West, 62.3% in North Central, 51% in the South South, 42% in the South West, and 34% in the South East (NPC, 2007). Expectedly, this situation is further compounded by the increase in the country's population, thus resulting in an increase in the growing number of the poor that rose "from 39 million in 1992 to 69 million in 2004" (NPC, 2007). Moreover, the incidence of poverty is more acute in the rural than in the urban areas (UN, 2004). This situation does not come as a surprise due to hardships and lack of infrastructures, access to potable water and good medical attention that rural dwellers have to contend with. Poverty has also taken an alarming dimension as the population of the urban poor is fast increasing due to the rapid growth of the population as well as the rural exodus to urban centers where rural migrants live in deplorable conditions; in addition to intra-urban and peri-urban migration (Odulana and Olomajeye, 1999; Osinubi, 2003). Migration is also partly due to serious lack of job opportunities in the rural areas. Moreover, the high level of unemployment has immensely contributed to poverty in Nigeria. The Minister of Labour, Mr. Adetokunbo Kayode, has himself underlined the state of the prevalence of unemployment in the country by relying on the World Bank figure of 40 million of unemployed Nigerians as he stated that "unemployment has assumed a different and worrisome dimension" (The Guardian, 2009a). A problem often associated with poverty in Nigeria is child labour, which is widespread in the rural areas and the urban centres. In the rural areas of the country children are habitually used on farms whereas they are found engaged in nefarious activities in urban centres. Successive governments have mapped out strategies to fight, reduce, or eradicate poverty. However, poverty continues to, not only defy solutions, but escalating. Another corollary of poverty in Nigeria is malnutrition. In fact, "[m]alnutrition is a silent emergency in Nigeria. Among children under age five, 29 per cent are underweight. Nearly 3 million children are suffering from chronic malnutrition and more than 1 million from stunting" (UNICEF, 2009). Malnutrition in the country is due partly to a high rate of food insecurity which is still a nagging experience. The case study of food insecurity in the cities of Lagos and Ibadan (the most urbanised cities of Nigeria) shows that there is "a high prevalence of over 70 % to be 'food insecure' " (Ajani, Adebukola, and Oyindamola, 2006: 66). To be sure,

poverty has also its ramification in health. The health sector has been in constant decay since the 1980s[2]. Poverty in conjunction with inadequate health policy have not only critically affected the improvement in health but also undermined the attainment of the MDGs goals in that area. The spate of diseases is still serious. For example, the UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Ann Veneman acknowledged the emergency in child health care. In her words, "more children die in Nigeria than any other country in Africa, largely from preventable diseases" (UNICEF, 2009).

A catalyst of development that has not fared well, especially since the introduction of SAP is education. It is a known fact that education plays a fundamental role in the progress of any nation. Ibidapo-Obe (2007:1) states that:

> Education is a major tool for national socio-economic development and for individual socio-economic empowerment and poverty reduction. The educational system is vital, because it produces the personnel that is required to function in various facets of national life and development process.

Table 3. Poverty Profile for Nigeria, March 2005

Indicators	1990	1996	2004	2005	2015 Target	Progress
Percentage of population living in relative poverty	43 [1992]	66	54	54 [2004]	21	Slow
Percentage of population living in extreme poverty (consuming 2,900 calories or lower daily)	-	-	35	35 [2004]	-	Insufficient data
Percentage of underweight children (under five)	36	31	30	30 [2004]	18	Slow

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005; World Bank, Development Indicators, cited in UNDP, 2004.

Based on the above analysis, it is apparent that the reduction and/or eradication of poverty is a *sine qua none* to attaining the other MDGs.

[2] Already in 1983, when General Sani Abacha then the General Officer Commanding the Second Mechanised Division of the Nigerian Army announced the military coup, he said that Nigerian Teaching Hospitals were mere consulting clinics.

Nigeria and the MDGs: Problems and Possibilities

Putting the attainment of these goals in the Nigerian context, it is clear that they are real challenges. Flowing from our discussions on the MDGs above, the Nigerian government is obviously overwhelmed by the tasks. The positive social impacts that the implementation of the MDGs can make in the lives of Nigerians were considered by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in giving debt relief to Nigeria. So far, the Nigerian government score sheet is unimpressive to the extent that the House of Representatives has threatened to stop financial allocation to any Ministry or Parastatal that has failed to implement the MDGs (The Vanguard, 2009). The real challenge that militates against the realization of the MDGs is those of policy implementation because adequate budgetary allocations have been made by the government. Furthermore, the implementation of MDGs has been characterized by deeply entrenched corruption and gross inefficiency, and wastefulness. For example, the Senate report on MDGs described the MDGs office as a "cesspool of corruption and shady deals" (The Guardian, 2009b). Corruption has been a major problem because "it makes the country unattractive to investors as it raises the cost and risk of doing business in the country" (UNDP, 2004). In addition, there is the problem of duplication of projects in the same areas by the Federal Government, and multilateral donor agencies. Even the Senior Special Assistant to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Hajia Amina Az-Zubair is skeptical about the possibilities of Nigeria meeting the MDGs by 2015 in spite of the huge funding which amounts to N320 billion deducted from the Debt Relief Gains (DRG) devoted to MDGs projects all over Nigeria (Nwokeoma, 2009). Although analysts believe that Nigeria can overcome the odds and achieve the MDGs in the areas of universal primary education, the fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS, and improve on the sustainability of its environment, and partner in global development, the fact still remains that reduction of child and maternal mortality, as well as lessening poverty (NPC, 2007).

Nigeria and the Millennium Development Goals: Prospects

From the foregoing discussions, it is apparent that Nigeria is inundated with poverty and economic underdevelopment which, coupled with poor administration, lack of political will, etc have made its yearning towards achieving the MDGs in 2015 very unrealistic. Then, what can Nigeria do to overcome these problems? Put differently, what are the ways out of the present predicaments to realizing the ideals and lofty goals of the MDGs by 2015? Let it be clearly stated here that despite its (Nigeria) present challenges to the realization of the goals, the country has sufficient resources needed to meet the MDGs target by 2015 but what is of utmost importance and require for this to materialize is for the

country's leadership to overhaul its conceptualization and implementation of policies and programmes to meet the 2015 targets. In specific terms, we recommend the followings:

First, government should establish credible and efficient institutions for proper public resource management, while the existing ones need to be strengthened. The imperative of this endeavour is to ensure efficient or better still, proper utilization of public resources (public goods) with the overall objective of preventing, or at least, minimizing waste and inefficiencies of the previous years the country witnessed especially under military rule (1983-1999). In *addendum,* this institutional re-engineering/restructuring, so to say, will give the opportunity of ensuring due process, diligence, accountability, etc. It is important to state here that the Nigerian government, especially under the present civilian administration has embarked on this endeavour. One good example of this initiative to meet the MDGs targets under the Obasanjo's administration (May 1999-May 2007) is the creation of the Oversight of Public Expenditure in Nigeria (OPEN). OPEN is established with the oversight functions of monitoring the Debt Relief Gains (DRGs) and this could serve as a model for two major reasons. First, OPEN's leadership is participatory, transparent, and involves government-civil society partnership in that it recognizes and includes the participation of both private and public sector (PPP). Second, the OPEN mechanism was established to track resources. Despite the exemplary model provided by OPEN, we should be very cautious here because development is very broad in definition and it entails a lot of indices that transcend the allocation of DRGs to some ministries and Parastatals. This is because; according to Igbuzor (2006) "development requires growth and structural change, some measures of distributive equity, modernization in social and cultural attitudes, a degree of political transformation and stability, an improvement in health and education so that population growth stabilizes, and an increase in urban living and employment." (See also Kambhampati, 2004).

Furthermore, establishing credible and efficient institutions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for total transformation in order to realize the MDGs in 2015. This needs to be complemented with, or go side by side with, transparency and accountability of these institutions, and the entrenchment of good governance and rule of law. Lack of accountability and transparency have been major challenges of development in Nigeria, especially with the advent of military rule. The country's financial experts have a great role to play in this regard.

At another level, the Nigerian authority should embark on pragmatic socio-economic policy reforms for the interests of all and sundry. These reforms should address the problems of rising cost of doing business in the country, inefficiency, lack of transparency and accountability, macroeconomic stabilization. Also to be addressed by such policy reforms are the problems associated with infrastructure, health, etc and reduce the risk of uncertainties characterized with business environment in Nigeria. Though, the Obasanjo's government economic reform (NEEDS) is commendable while the present Yar'Adua's government's Seven Point Agenda is in its embryonic stage, more of these reforms are needed with strong political will and sincerity of purpose to achieve the stated goals. Also important is that

such economic policy reforms should be Pro-Poor Growth oriented. It is equally necessary to promote sound policy to increase productivity in the agricultural sector (NPC, 2007). Though it is acknowledged that the Nigerian economy recorded some appreciable growth rate in recent years (especially under the Obasanjo's presidency) but it should be realized that such economic growth can only be sustainable and achieving the MDGs targets, if and only if, such growth is pro-Poor. What this connotes is that economic growth should leads to poverty alleviation and betterment of the lots of ordinary Nigerians (i.e. the masses). The essence of the pro-Poor economic growth could be deciphered in President Obasanjo's statement from the NEEDS document when he said: "we must not continue to stress the pursuit of a high growth rate in statistical terms and fail to reduce the social and economic deprivation of a substantial number and group of our people. We must not absolutely pursue wealth and growth at the expense of inner wellbeing, joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment of human being." (See Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

Another important area that Nigeria needs to invest its energy on to meet the MDGs targets is to reinforcing its collaboration (i.e. partnership) with development partners. Though, we have argued earlier that Nigeria is blessed with human and material resources, but it still need additional external assistance to make adequate progress towards achieving the MDGs. According to the 2005 World Bank and the UK Department for International Development's Country Strategy Partnership Strategy's document, it is estimated that Nigeria would require external financing of about $6.4 billion annually between 2005 and 2008. It is argued that Nigeria received during this period only $2 per capita in ODA which is marginal compare to the average for Africa of $28 per capita. This is why Nigeria is been regarded as been highly under aided. Furthermore partnership with development partners which will also involve interaction between government, public sector and the private sector at the external environment. Thus, this will "require transformists from the public sector, civil society, media and public sector to build a critical movement of people advocating for and implementing change." (Igbuzor, 2006).

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